



CITY OF LODI

COUNCIL COMMUNICATION

AGENDA TITLE: Report by Lodi East Side Improvement Committee

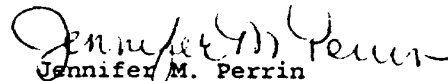
MEETING DATE: January 5, 1994

PREPARED BY: City Clerk

RECOMMENDED ACTION: None required.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION: Virginia Snyder of the Lodi East Side Improvement Committee will be present at the City Council meeting to give a report to the City Council (see copy attached).

FUNDING: None required.


Jennifer M. Perrin
City Clerk

JMP

COUNCOM9/TXTA.02J/COUNCOM

APPROVED _____

THOMAS A PETERSON
City Manager



END OF YEAR REPORT TO CITY COUNCIL

From: Virginia Snyder, Eastside Improvement Committee
January 5, 1994

WHAT A YEAR IT WAS!

On February 3, 1993, the Lodi City Council appointed John Young, Virginia Lahr, and Virginia Snyder an eastside taskforce to combat crime, drugs, and blight in our city. We've been on a dead run ever since.

The unqualified support of city staff and enthusiastic response of citizens has allowed us to accomplish in our first year more than we ever dreamed possible.

An estimated 150 residents attended our first public meeting in March. We focused on code enforcement, and also how to report crime while remaining anonymous. Loel Center donated the meeting place, Farmers and Merchants Bank gave us "seed" money, and people from all over Lodi offered to help. We gratefully accepted.

In April, Cal-Waste donated dumpsters, and members of Calvary Bible Church helped EIC to clean up a disabled resident's yard. At our second meeting, we began educating citizens on how to: sue owners of drug houses, spot gangs or drug labs, and document other criminal activity. In cooperation with the Community Services officers of the Lodi Police Department, Colleen Dixon and Clay Saylor launched a vigorous campaign to establish more Neighborhood Watch groups throughout Lodi.

By May, we began questioning new liquor license applications in eastside neighborhoods, invited city council members to walk around our neighborhoods to see our problems first-hand, and participated in the police crime fair. Our third meeting dealt with pride in our neighborhoods and Virginia Lahr began educating us on the rights and responsibilities of both landlords and tenants.

June was the month we began to explore the needs of small business. Our goal is to create a climate where business can flourish to provide jobs, services, and tax revenues. Also, we began mailing courteous letters to property owners who were in violation of Lodi's "ugly" ordinance. We also discovered that city codes were not being enforced, and began a campaign to require enforcement.

On warm summer nights, gangs of youths from various backgrounds engaged in crimes of violence and vandalism which serve to inflame old fears and prejudices which divide us. Lodi's rich heritage includes citizens of many different origins and backgrounds. "Who is my Neighbor?" was Paula Soto's focus in July as we began to reach out to people of

different cultures.

July also brought out problems with rats, roaches, and other vermin throughout Lodi. At our request, the city council directed the city manager to investigate ways the city could provide code enforcement. Individual neighbors planned cleanups, but the rusted automobiles, junk, and discarded furniture still accumulated.

While the LDS church youth group painted the home of a disabled resident, drive-by shootings, gang fights, and vandalism by other youths plagued our neighborhoods in August. Bands of roving youths roamed our streets and alleys in a reign of terror. Again, we approached the city council --this time to request a curfew and to prohibit alcohol in city parks.

We also adopted the newly-refurbished Hale Park and held a wonderful party to celebrate. The message to gang members, prostitutes, and winos was clear: "This park belongs to our citizens and we intend it to be a safe place for children to play."

"How Safe is Your Neighborhood?" was our theme for September. Under Colleen Dixon and the police Community Service Officers, Lodi Neighborhood Watch groups increased by fifty percent. On Watch Night Out, neighbors all over Lodi got together for block parties. Congratulations, Lodi! We placed FIFTH in our category in the entire nation for NW participation!

Our EIC Drill Team pushed garbage carts in the Grape Festival Parade to send out the message: "Clean up the Crime and Drugs and Blight." (We won first prize in our division.)

Landlord/Tenant responsibilities were in the spotlight in October. Housing experts Virginia Lahr and Kevin Suess worked to inform residents of the housing laws. With a donation of labor and dumpsters by Cal-Waste, Rita Rott and Tony Canton headed up an Eastside Cleanup Week. Over two hundred tons of junk were hauled off. This pointed up the need for yearly city-wide cleanups.

November brought an offer from F&M Bank to assist homebuyers to purchase eastside property under the Community Reinvestment Act. Details are still being worked out, but some exciting opportunities are coming up. Also, the city council enacted the curfew ordinance we requested. This gives the police one more weapon in the battle against gangs. Also, November featured our Community Outreach team under the leadership of JoAnne Mounce. This group handles fund raising, passes out literature at business locations, and oversees liason with the churches. Kathy Baker handles all publicity--such as monthly TV shows on King Videocable,

newspaper releases, etc.

We announced our full support of LDBA and of the Cherokee Lane Business Association as both groups explore possibilities for revitalization.

Also in December, fourteen residents sued the owner of a property that neighbors have declared a public nuisance. The Small Claims Action requests \$5,000.00 for each plaintiff. The court is considering the matter now, and will render its judgment soon. Mr. McNatt furnished us with a copy of an appellate court decision which reaffirms the right of neighbors to sue the owners of rental property for damages if steps are not taken to control such crimes as drug dealing, gang hangouts, and other conditions which destroy nearby property values and cause the neighbors distress.

We're deeply grateful for the tremendous help we've received from city staff. There are too many to mention, but I would like to commend Mr. Tom Peterson, Mr. Bob McNatt, and Mrs. Jennifer Perrin. These individuals typify all those city employees who have given generously of their time and wisdom to help us get started, keep us out of legal hot water, and point out available resources.

Throughout this first year of our existence, the Lodi City Council has been solidly behind us all the way. You have encouraged us, guided us, and thoughtfully considered each request we've made. This partnership between citizens and government is a fine demonstration of democracy at work. This council has been forced to juggle the wants and needs of over 50,000 people in a time of budget cutbacks. You've caught the vision of a more liveable, lovable Lodi, and taken the necessary steps to implement that vision.

We look forward to working with you in this new year. We have several projects in the planning stages which we'll be presenting to you at the appropriate times. Among them are:

1. We intend to request a donation of \$25,000.00 from a local corporation to purchase security lighting for private residences, mobile homes, businesses, and rental units in eastside neighborhoods. At the suggestion of Mr. McNatt, we request that this be an agenda item at the next council meeting.
2. Some of our eastside neighborhoods have no street lighting at all, and they are dark and dangerous places to be. This year, we intend to ask you to consider designating block grant funds for street and alley lighting. To save on costs, we're hoping to utilize existing utility poles which are already in place in many locations. We'll be consulting with Mr. Hans Hansen, Assistant Utility Director for the City of Lodi, and with the city attorney for help in putting

together a request that is most workable and cost-effective.

The city already has in place a program where citizens can request dusk-to-dawn lights which are installed on existing power poles. The cost is \$12.00 per month to the property owner and there is no installation charge. We believe that more lighting on both private property and city property will be one more crime deterrent.

3. We expect to ask you to include a twice-a-year cleanup in city negotiations with California Waste. We envision citywide curbside pickup of discarded household furnishings, appliances, and even hazardous waste. We'll bring specifics to you at a later date. If such a service necessitates a raise in garbage rates, we hope you will consider putting the matter on the ballot so that Lodi citizens can decide whether they want such a service.

4. We plan to ask you to revise Lodi's "Ugly Ordinance" to include such things as requiring property owners to clean up back yards which are so full of debris they harbor rats, roaches, and spiders; garbage cans left on the streets after pickup day; rags and sheets used instead of conventional window coverings; automobiles parked on lawns, etc.

5. We will approach you on noise abatement. In many of our neighborhoods, the loud and steady blaring of boom boxes is enough to drive the neighbors crazy. Also, automobiles cruising with stereos so loud they disturb residents for a block away deprive citizens of the peaceful enjoyment of their homes.

6. The best Christmas present the EIC could have received came from our very able city council--a code enforcement officer for Lodi! There can be no doubt in anybody's mind that this city council is dedicated to neighborhood preservation, but we still have a tremendous amount of work to be done in this area. This new code enforcement officer will be working twenty hours per week and we have enough "ugly" to keep him or her busy for a long time. For more serious violations, this individual will need help when he or she encounters situations that demand the expertise of a professional building inspector or fire inspector.

We already have experienced and capable city employees who are trained to handle these serious violations, but there is a possibility their talents are not being fully utilized.

We have requested that the newly-formed City Efficiency Committee study the code enforcement area to see whether some streamlining is possible. With a staff as large as the one we have, we hope to have the best of both worlds--prompt service for new building construction, and also vigorous code enforcement to preserve our existing housing stock.

For the citizens of Lodi, 1994 will be a time of challenge and a time of hope. Nationwide and here at home, crime and drugs and blight appear to be out of control in a world gone mad. The Eastside Improvement Committee does not believe our situation is hopeless. We're not giving up on California, we're not giving up on Lodi, and we're not giving up our rights to the slumlords, drug dealers and hoodlums. Throughout our history, whenever things looked pretty dim, Americans have formed a committee to turn things around. There is strength in numbers, there is strength in decency, and there is strength in saying "we've had enough!"

Thank you, and Happy New Year.